



The victim's finger looked like this after the pencil flare misfired.

You Can Try To Get Away From It All...



As shown here, the pencil flare the author's daughter found was about seven inches long.

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...But it may follow you. We were camping in the Cascade Mountains north of Seattle one Labor Day weekend when my 17-year-old daughter, Michele, stumbled upon what she thought was a mini-flashlight. She was on her way back to camp at the time from exploring the area.

My wife and I were headed down a trail that led to a nearby river, when we heard Michele call out, "Mom, what did I find?" I stayed where I was to remove some debris from the trail while my wife went back to camp to see if she could answer Michele's question.

As my wife approached, Michele was looking at a gold object about five to seven inches long, with a plastic tube at one end. At the same time, she was moving a black knob on the side to see if it worked.

Nothing happened until Michele handed the object to my wife. At that moment, it worked, and my wife ended up with a blood blister that formed so fast it popped. She also had powder burns. The object turned out to be a

pencil flare (similar to the Mk-79 Mod-0 flares issued to aircrews) that some careless camper had dropped. The end cap shot out, hitting my wife's right index finger.

Closer inspection of the flare revealed that someone had tried to use it, but it had misfired three or four times.

Thanks to good planning, we had a first-aid kit, which I used to treat my wife's injured finger. It healed fine, except for a scar that's visible when her hand gets cold. As for my daughter and a 5-year-old who was with us, they learned a lesson about picking up things along the trail. I also couldn't help wondering what would have happened if the flare had fired into the tinder-dry canopy of the forest. A fire could have trapped us and many other nearby campers because we were on a dead-end road leading to a glacier.

When we returned home, I learned that pencil flares like the one my daughter found are available to anyone over the age of 18, with no training or licenses required. This particular one had no markings or warnings about its dangers. ■